

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5302S

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 0630

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAID

SUBJECT: EMERGENCY FOOD AID FOR MAURITANIA

REF: STATE 059052

1. WE ARE MOST GRATEFUL FOR THOUGHTFUL EFFORT STATE AND AID HAVE MADE TO DEVISE A GRANT FOOD AID PROGRAM FOR MAURITANIA WHICH, IN ADDITION TO CONTRIBUTING TO THE MEETING OF A REAL AND OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE HUMAN NEED, WOULD SERVE TO ADVANCE US POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC INTERESTS HERE WHILE BEING RESPONSIVE TO THE CONCERNS EXPRESSED AND THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY KEY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS FOR FOREIGN POLICY, POLITICAL, AND/OR BUDGETARY REASONS.

2. THE IMMEDIATE AND IMMENSELY GENEROUS RESPONSE THREE YEARS AGO BY THE USG AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE TO MAURITANIA'S APPEAL FOR EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE GENERATED ENORMOUS GOOD WILL AND PRODUCED REPEATED DECLARATIONS AND ACTS OF APPRECIATION. OUR OPEN-HANDED RESPONSE TO THEIR CRITICAL NEED STIMULATED A
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FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE US; IT WAS THE SINGLE

MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN OVERCOMING THE BITTERNESS SURROUNDING THE 1967-1969 BREAK IN RELATIONS. US GENEROSITY SAVED LIVES, AND GIRM OFFICIALS AT ALL LEVELS HAVE QUIETLY AND EXPLICITLY RECOGNIZED THIS.

3. IF WE ARE NOW UNABLE BECAUSE OF PUBLIC CONCERNS OR CONGRESSIONAL SENSITIVITIES WHICH CANNOT BE IGNORED TO RESPOND IN GENEROUS FASHION TO MAURITANIA'S NEWEST REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE WITHOUT IMPOSING SUCH A SERIES OF ONEROUS CONDITIONS THAT THE VERY POLITICAL GAINS WE WOULD HOPE TO MAKE VIA A BILATERAL FOOD AID PROGRAM WILL BE SERIOUSLY UNDERCUT IF NOT ENTIRELY CANCELLED OUT, WE SHOULD PERHAPS QUIT THE BILATERAL EMERGENCY FOOD AID GAME IN MAURITANIA WHILE WE ARE AHEAD. A FOOD AID PROGRAM OF MODEST PROPORTIONS HEDGED AROUND THE OUTSET WITH RENEWED DEMANDS FOR ANCIENT STATISTICS, DEMANDS FOR IRONCLAD ASSURANCES ABOUT PRESENT AND FUTURE IMPONDERABLES, AND INSISTENCE ON GUARANTEES OF PERFORMANCE BY A COUNTRY WHICH IS FIGHTING FOR ITS VERY EXISTENCE WILL ANGER THE DISASTER RELIEF DIRECTOR AND CONVINCE HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES THAT THE US IS CLEARLY IF QUIETLY UNFRIENDLY. COMING JUST A FEW WEEKS AFTER OUR DECISION NOT TO PROVIDE A MODEST AMOUNT OF GRANT ARMS AID AND TO INSIST ON A STRAIGHT COMMERCIAL SALE FOR HARD CASH (A DECISION WHICH HAS BEEN WIDELY VIEWED AS PROOF OF US DISINTEREST IF NOT HOSTILITY BY GIRM CIVILIAN AND MILITARY OFFICIALS FROM THE PRESIDENT (SEE AMMAN 895) ON DOWN), A PARSIMONIOUS AND CONDITIONAL RESPONSE TO THE CURRENT FOOD REQUEST WOULD CONVINCE EVEN THE REMAINING HOLD-OUTS THAT THE US IS SOMETHING OTHER THAN A WARM FRIEND.

3. LET US THEREFORE LAY THE PROPOSED BILATERAL PROGRAM GENTLY TO ONE SIDE, AND DECIDE INSTEAD TO FUNNEL WHATEVER FOOD AID WE ARE WILLING TO PROVIDE THIS HARD-PRESSED NATION THROUGH THE INTERNATIONALLY MANAGED WORLD FOOD PROGRAM. THIS APPROACH WOULD ALLOW US RIGHTLY TO CLAIM THE KUDOS DUE A NATION MOTIVATED BY HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS, AND WOULD SIMULTANEOUSLY AVOID THE PUBLIC OR CONGRESSIONAL NEURALGIAS ABOUT THE ADMINISTRATION OF US BILATERAL FOOD AID EFFORTS AND THE RESULTING LIMITATIONS.

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4. FUNNELING OUR IMMEDIATE AND MID-TERM EMERGENCY FOOD AID THROUGH THE WFP WOULD ALSO GIVE THE MAURITANIANS A YEAR OR SO TO REGAIN THEIR ECONOMIC BALANCE (AND THUS THEIR PURCHASING ABILITY) AND US TIME TO ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE A CASH-ON-THE-BARRELHEAD TITLE I SALES PROGRAM, A GRAIN STABILIZATION PROGRAM, OR SOME OTHER MEANS OF NAVIGATING AROUND THE SUBMERGED ROCKS OF MAURITANIAN AND CONGRESSIONAL SENSITIVITIES WHICH DOT THE TITLE II BILATERAL GIFT PROGRAM CHANNEL.

6. US MISSION IN MAURITANIA BELIEVES THAT CLEAR-CUT FIRST CHOICE IS BILATERAL GRANT PROGRAM GEARED TIGHTLY TO DEMONSTRATED GIRM PERFORMANCE AS DISTRIBUTION PROGRESSES. BUT IF SUBSTANTIAL US EMERGENCY FOOD AID PROGRAM CANNOT BE MOUNTED WITHOUT INCLUSION OF PROBLEM-CREATING PRECONDITIONS, MISSION FURTHER BELIEVES THAT US SHOULD CHANNEL ITS FOOD ASSISTANCE THROUGH MULTI-DONOR WORLD FOOD PROGRAM.

7. SEPTTEL FOLLOWS RE TECHNICAL PROBLEMS RAISED REFTEL.HANDYSIDE

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